

and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience."

We are blessed to live in a country built on freedom of conscience, thought, and action. Waves and waves of hopeful aspirants have flocked to these shores to exercise this basic human right.

But in every era, religious freedom, like all other freedoms, has come under challenge. And in every era, we have been called upon to promote and defend religious liberty here at home and in faraway lands. We do so as a matter of principle. Freedom of conscience and religion is the most basic, fundamental human right. No person should be persecuted, imprisoned or harmed because of their personal faith. But as 9/11 showed us with such terrible force, we also do so as a matter of national security.

I thank Senator SANTORUM for bringing this topic front and center to Capitol Hill yesterday, along with his distinguished panelists.

We heard from the eminent U.N. Ambassador John Bolton on the gains that are being made around the globe. We also heard from courageous dissidents, including Dr. Wafa Sultan and Eli El-Khoury, who have suffered for their faith and been persecuted for their convictions.

America must remain ever vigilant to the threats, challenges, and opportunities we face. From North Korea to the troubled Middle East, for millions of people, religious liberty is still a fragile hope they look to us to nurture.

It is our duty as Americans and our honor as sons and daughters of the greatest revolution and the ongoing American experiment in ordered liberty and religious freedom.

TRIBUTE TO MANNY CORTEZ

Mr. REID. Mr. President, when people around the world think of my home State of Nevada, their first thoughts are usually of Las Vegas.

Around the world, people know us for our first-class entertainment and resorts, our world-class dining, and for slogans like "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." But what most people don't know is that Las Vegas is the city it is today because of the hard work of one man—Manny Cortez. Manny was a friend, and it is with great sadness that I come to the chamber today to pay tribute to his life. He passes away from a heart attack on Sunday. He was 67.

Manny Cortez achieved so much in life. He served on the Clark County Commission, the Taxi Authority, and in the district attorney's office. He was, however, best known as the president of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. He held this post for 13 years, from 1991 to 2004. Under Manny's tenure, Las Vegas went from seeing 21 million visitors a year to

more than 35 million, from 1.8 convention delegates to nearly 6 million, and from 73,000 hotel rooms to 140,000 hotel rooms.

As his successor on the convention board, Rossi Ralenkotter, said: Manny was one of the cornerstones that made Las Vegas the success it is today.

Former Clark County Commissioner Paul Christensen has echoed that sentiment, saying: Putting Manny Cortez in charge of the (convention authority) was one of the better moves we ever made. He never ever told you he would do something that he wouldn't back up.

Throughout his life, Manny was recognized as an astute marketer and businessman. For example, he was named Person of the Year by Travel Magazine in 1999. He was past president of the Boys and Girls Clubs in Las Vegas. He served on a number of boards. But for all his achievements and success, I think the Las Vegas community will remember Manny more for being a leader and good man.

In Monday's Las Vegas Sun, Editor Brian Greenspun shares this recollection of Manny.

When the late Gov. Mike O'Callaghan appointed Manny to the Taxi Authority, he said that in Manny he had a man who cared about people and about doing what was right. Manny lived that obligation throughout his life.

That is how I will remember Manny too, as a good man who always did the right thing.

Manny—like Las Vegas—was a true American success story. He was born in Las Cruces, NM. His father was a baker. His mother was a retailer. They moved to Las Vegas when Manny was 5. A product of Las Vegas schools, he held a degree from Nevada Southern University. He didn't start at the top, but he ended up there.

Manny leaves behind his wife Joanna, two daughters, Catherine and Cynthia, and two grandchildren, Andrew and Christina. Today, Mr. President, our prayers are with them.

Many is gone. He will be missed. And his presence will be felt by everyone who visits Las Vegas.

IMPROVING SERVICES FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, yesterday I introduced legislation to improve services for homeless veterans, and prevent chronic homelessness amongst our returning servicemen and women in the war on terror. This bill will expand the housing and services available to our Nation's homeless veterans and their dependents, and improve the ability of the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, to provide health care services to this same group of deserving Americans. I will take a few moments now to explain the provisions of this legislation.

Public Law 107-95 was the last comprehensive homeless veterans assistance act signed into law. A number of the authorizations in that law, aimed

at preventing and reducing homelessness amongst veterans, have expired or will expire this year. In March, I held a hearing on these needs, at which VA, its Federal partners, and community-based service providers to the homeless testified about what is working, what isn't, what duplication might be eliminated, and where deficiencies exist that must be addressed.

At the hearing, we learned that this year alone, more than a half dozen Federal agencies will devote over \$2 billion to homelessness. VA alone will spend upward of \$221 million on grants, housing and treatment of underlying conditions. In fact, the budget the Senate passed included record-level funding for the sixth straight year for targeted programs for homeless veterans. These figures do not include the total costs of the law enforcement and emergency medical treatment for the homeless, which are astounding.

Plainly stated, America's chronically homeless are some of the most expensive people in communities across this country, yet they live lives no one wants to imagine having. We must ensure that our resources are invested carefully so that homeless veterans can resume their self-sufficiency and independence. I believe this bill will help us realize this shared goal.

Among other things, this measure extends the authorization of appropriations for comprehensive services for homeless veterans, a grant program for homeless veterans with special needs, a technical assistance program, and extends the authority of the Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans. It also extends the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to transfer properties obtained through foreclosures of Department home mortgages to certain organizations to assist homeless veterans and their families in acquiring shelter. The bill also includes the authorization of appropriations for a program designed to prevent homelessness by providing financial assistance to eligible entities to provide and coordinate the provision of supportive services for very low-income veteran families occupying permanent housing.

I am pleased to introduce the Comprehensive Homeless Veterans Assistance and Prevention Act of 2006 along with my committee ranking member, Senator AKAKA, as well as two committee members who have been particularly active on issues facing homeless veterans, Senators BURR and OBAMA.

Over the coming days, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs will be taking up this bill and other legislation introduced to improve the range of services and benefits available to our Nation's veterans. I look forward to working with my colleagues throughout the rest of this Congress on these and other important efforts.